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## **Preservationists to survey historic Centennial Hill neighborhood**

As part of National Preservation Month, preservationists will be hitting the streets on May 27 to conduct a survey of Centennial Hill, one of the city's most prominent historic neighborhoods. Since its origin in the late 1860s, Centennial Hill has served as the center of Montgomery's African-American history and culture.

Staff from the Alabama Historical Commission and the City of Montgomery, along with volunteers, will photograph and write an architectural description of every structure in the district. Documentation of each address will then be linked to a map of the neighborhood. The survey information will be used to nominate portions of Centennial Hill to the National Register of Historic Places.

Centennial Hill evolved after the Civil War ended in 1865, when newly freed blacks looking for a place to settle flocked to Montgomery in unprecedented numbers. Many whites showed their displeasure by shutting out black customers and business owners. Wealthy black businessmen James Hale and Elijah Cook addressed this problem by purchasing a large amount of land, and then selling it to other blacks. The result was a flourishing black neighborhood that was totally self-sustaining in a time of racial segregation – alive with thriving businesses, a hospital and quality schools.

The Civil Rights Movement in Montgomery can trace much of its roots to Centennial Hill, with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. Richard Harris and Amelia Browder all living there at one time. Civic groups such as the Colored Women's Club, which still meets today at the Jackson Community House, and the Women's Political Council were formed and played pivotal roles in the movement. Educational institutions like Mrs. White's Industrial School for Girls, Centennial High School and Alabama State Normal School for Colored Students were built in the 1880s and 1890s. Professionals like Victor Tulane, the first black member of the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce, and Dr. Cornelius Dorsette, the city's first black physician, started businesses in the neighborhood.

Although in decline since the 1960s, the neighborhood retains many late nineteenth to mid twentieth-century buildings that are representative of Victorian, Craftsman, and Tudor Revival architecture, along with shotgun, side gable, cross gable, and hip roof cottages. The community also features a number of Gothic and Mission Revival Churches.

*The mission of the **Alabama Historical Commission** is to protect, preserve, and interpret Alabama's historic places. It is the state's historic preservation agency and serves as the State Historic Preservation Office.*

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